



CEPPS/NDI Quarterly Report: April 1 to June 30, 2005

**REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN: CIVIC ADVOCACY SUPPORT AND POLITICAL
PARTY STRENGTHENING**

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I. SUMMARY

During the current reporting period, Kazakhstan's political environment has continued its trend away from openness and political plurality with the introduction and parliamentary approval of three laws restricting the freedoms of individuals and organizations of all kinds, both domestic and international. Government inspections and audits of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including National Democratic Institute (NDI) partner organizations, continued, and opposition mass media outlets have been closed or suffered costly legal judgments for purported libel and defamation of character. Since recent events in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the government of Kazakhstan has been increasingly concerned with the prevention of civil unrest within its borders.

NDI's programming in Kazakhstan seeks to support active participation in and monitoring of elections by democratic civic and political groups. The Institute's activity during this quarter focused on training for political parties and development of relationships with NGOs throughout the country to organize advocacy efforts. NDI held individual meetings with both opposition and pro-government parties, and conducted training in grassroots campaign techniques for opposition party ALGA Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (ALGA DCK) in Almaty and Shymkent. While NDI underwent daily investigations by government authorities at the end of the first quarter, the threat of further investigation continued into the first part of the current reporting period. For that reason, the Institute was hindered in its ability to undertake programming, and some of its planned training activities with pro-government parties were postponed.

Also this quarter, NDI supported its civic partner organization, the Republican Network of Independent Monitors (RNIM) in training election monitors and observing by-elections to Maslikhats (local legislatures) in Almaty, Karaganda, Shymkent and Aktau. RNIM issued press releases and held press conferences to publicize its findings, which included widespread abuse of administrative resources and executive interference in the conduct of elections.

NDI continued this quarter to assist its other primary civic partner, the Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan (YISK), to diversify its funding sources and strengthen its organizational capacity. NDI delivered training in fundraising and grant writing techniques, and has held several consultations with YISK leaders on long-term planning.

NDI also continued implementation of a U.S. State Department-funded program to open information centers throughout the republic, which will complement the Institute's work under this agreement.

II. BACKGROUND

Political Context

Since its independence, Kazakhstan's elections have been marred by manipulation and fraud, media bias, abuse of administrative resources and unequal treatment of political parties and candidates. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has not recognized any elections in Kazakhstan as free or fair. The OSCE characterized the September 2004 Majilis election as failing to meet OSCE commitments and international standards, and deemed the actions of the Central Election Commission (CEC) as "arbitrary, selective and non-transparent."

During the current reporting period, Kazakhstan's political environment has continued its trend away from openness and political plurality with the introduction and parliamentary approval of three laws restricting the freedoms of individuals and organizations of all kinds, both domestic and international. These laws are:

- 1) "On the Activities of Branches and Representative Offices (Separate Subdivisions) of International or Foreign Non-commercial Organizations in the Republic of Kazakhstan;"
- 2) "On introduction of Amendments and Additions into Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Matters Related to Non-commercial Organizations;" and
- 3) Amendments to Legal Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Issues Relating to National Security.

The first two draft laws relate to the activities of NGOs, such as NDI and its civic partner organizations, operating in Kazakhstan. The third law, which was signed by President Nazarbayev on June 29, relates to the activities of Kazakhstani political parties, NGOs, media and religious organizations, and thus may be the most egregious.

This legislation has moved through the ratification process unchanged, although not entirely without dissent within the Majilis (parliament). Government inspections and audits of NGOs (including NDI and its local partners) continue, and opposition mass media outlets have been closed or suffered costly legal judgments for purported libel and defamation of character. Opposition leaders have had bank accounts frozen, and there have been physical attacks on opposition party members in Oskemen and Shymkent. Since the developments in neighboring

Kyrgyzstan and the civilian uprising in Uzbekistan, the government of Kazakhstan has been increasingly concerned with the prevention of civil unrest within its borders.

While the recent introduction of experimental indirect elections of regional and city executives during this quarter is, in fact, a step in the direction of devolving some power from the Executive, this does not represent a significant change, as the councils that will elect those executives remain compliant and controllable by the Nazarbayev regime through party discipline, clan and personal loyalties.

Opposition political parties are weak and remain unable to unite. An attempt at consolidation was made by Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK)-Communist bloc and three-fifths of the Ak Zhol party (now known as Naghyz Ak Zhol, or “True Bright Path”), which joined to form the people’s movement For a Just Kazakhstan (FJK). This movement, which is not registered as a political party, has formally proposed a single presidential candidate to oppose President Nazarbayev, former Otan party deputy chairman and parliamentary speaker, Zharmakhan Tuyakbai. Mr. Tuyakbai’s statements on his political positions have focused on the fair distribution of national wealth among Kazakhstani citizens, transparency of government, and a break from clan-based political and economic control.

Previous NDI Activity

NDI opened its first office in Almaty in 1992, closed it in 1996, and re-opened it in May 1999. The Institute’s primary area of focus in 1999 was to provide assistance for the creation and development of a nationwide, domestic, non-partisan monitoring effort for the October 1999 parliamentary elections. From 1999 to 2002, NDI worked primarily toward the strengthening of civic organizations, without overtly political dimensions.

In early 2002, NDI assisted two organizations-- “Azat,” focusing on Kazakh issues, and DETAR, which promoted democracy education in the Kazakh language-- into a single public association, the Republican Network of Independent Monitors (RNIM). By early 2003, RNIM had conducted election observation and led legislative advocacy campaigns, establishing itself as a high profile, respected civic organization in Kazakhstan, though it struggled with organizational structure and growth challenges.

In the hope of fostering citizen participation among Kazakhstan’s younger generation, NDI has also provided financial and technical support to the Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan (YISK). With NDI training and consultation, YISK launched advocacy campaigns to improve student services and living conditions, and to oppose a draft youth policy law. In 2003, YISK launched a new project, the League of Young Voters (LYV). The goals of the LYV project are to increase youth involvement in election and decision-making processes, educate young people on democratic principles, increase the number of students involved in the political process, and provide an alternative to government-sponsored youth organizations.

While initial NDI activity in Kazakhstan focused primarily on civic organizations, in 2002 the Institute identified the need to strengthen political parties, and expanded its political party training program. From spring 2003 until the 2004 Majilis elections, NDI held a series of

training programs and regional constituent outreach events for political parties. In summer and fall 2004, NDI held training sessions for political party election monitors and election commissioners.

During the winter and spring of 2004-05, NDI held seminars for political parties, domestic and international NGOs, government officials and interested citizens on the lessons learned from the 2004 parliamentary elections and how to apply those lessons toward improving future elections in Kazakhstan. NDI conducted training for pro-government parties on grass-roots campaign techniques, but was hindered in its ability to conduct programming overall by investigations by government agencies. NDI was also active during this period supporting the Republican Network of Independent Monitors (RNIM) in its activities, which included an international conference on election monitoring in the former Soviet Union, and significant organizational restructuring.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

A. Political Party Programming

The objectives of NDI's current programming in Kazakhstan are:

- To assist the development of nationwide democratic political organizations; and
- To strengthen the capacity of these groups to compete in future elections.

Party Training Programs

NDI's political party staff met with leaders of pro-presidential parties Otan, Asar and the Civic-Agrarian bloc, as well as with opposition parties Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DCK), Ak Zhol, Naghyz Ak Zhol and For Just Kazakhstan (FJK) to plan future training programs designed to increase their ability to compete effectively in the political process. DCK had its registration as a political party revoked in January 2005, and has since re-registered as a political movement called "ALGA DCK" (or, "Forward, DCK"). On April 19-20, NDI delivered training on grassroots campaign techniques to 22 members of ALGA DCK, to provide it the tools necessary to gather enough signatures for re-registration as a political party.

Training included both theoretical and practical exercises, covering campaign strategy development and implementation, volunteer management, message and door-to-door script development. Participants then began testing what they had developed in the classroom, by knocking on doors and speaking to citizens in their homes and in public places. More than 75 percent of those trained were women, and all were between the ages of 30-40 years old. On June 16, NDI conducted a similar training program for 20 ALGA DCK regional activists (60 percent of whom were women) in Shymkent.

The trainings, which were conducted in both Russian and Kazakh languages, went very well. The practical exercises showed that the level of preparation of ALGA DCK agitators in Shymkent is significantly lower than that of those in Almaty. It became apparent during the trainings that not all ALGA DCK agitators always follow a single ALGA DCK message, but

over the course of the training they began to understand the importance of doing so. NDI could see great improvement of the use of a consistent ALGA DCK message as participants' messages became more concise and consistent after the classroom practice and door-to-door exercises. Though trainees will need ongoing advice in order for the information to be absorbed fully, NDI saw great progress in just one day's time, which was encouraging for future message development trainings. NDI plans to conduct follow-up programs in the future.

NDI asked participants to fill out evaluation forms, and the participants rated the practical exercises (going door-to-door and role-playing) as the most helpful aspect of the training. In addition to gaining stronger message development and public speaking skills during the door-to-door exercises, the Almaty participants recruited 22 new political activists for ALGA DCK. Their suggestions will be incorporated into future trainings.

With continuing uncertainty over government inspections of NDI and its partners' offices, the Institute was not able to conduct programming at the level it had planned. On more than one occasion, planned training sessions were postponed or cancelled in response to actions of the Kazakhstani government.

B. Civic Programming

During this quarter, NDI rotated a new civic program officer into its Almaty office. To introduce the new officer to NDI programs and partners, the Almaty-based civic team traveled throughout the country, meeting with civic leaders and discussing priorities, as well as exploring areas of possible future collaboration. NDI staff met with leaders of its primary partner organizations, RNIM and YISK, and also established new relationships with civic organizations interested in democratic development throughout the country. The cities visited were: Aktau, Astana, Karaganda, Kokshetau, Semey, Shymkent, Taraz and Kyzylorda. The goals of this outreach trip were:

- To accomplish introductory meetings with key RNIM and YISK organizers and other community leaders;
- To identify new potential leaders and organizations to engage in civic programming;
- To assess the situation in various cities, with regard to willingness to participate in NDI activities between elections;
- To record any concerns of organizers regarding the amendments to election, national security and NGO laws; and,
- To get a better understanding of next steps for civic programming country-wide.

The trip was very productive both in terms of basic introductions and new outreach. As a result of these meetings, NDI was able to gauge the needs of communities around the country. The Institute was able to bring together numerous NGOs in each city, which gave the organizations an opportunity to share information with one another and to begin to identify possible collaborative efforts. This outreach also provided the civic team with an important perspective on how NDI is perceived in the field.

Among the most significant findings, NDI learned that:

- Most NGOs are overstretched in regard to their programming, to such an extent that they are unable to execute any one project to successful completion. Instead, they tend to conduct a series of projects with little success because, as they explained, “no one else is dealing with these problems.” There is no real government infrastructure for social and civic issues. This was a common problem across the country with no immediate solution at hand.
- Students are under pressure from their university and local government administrations to comply with strict guidelines restricting participation in non-governmental political activities. Post-Ukraine issues were repeatedly cited across the country and are still causing problems for students (and others) who were involved in the election monitoring activity in that country.
- Outreach to the villages was cited by many organizations as a problem that needs urgent attention. However, poor transportation infrastructure and lack of resources for travel, printed materials and trainings have restrained most NGOs from doing work in the villages.

NDI is planning follow-on outreach for the next quarter to address some of these issues. NDI will focus particularly in the Southern and Western Regions of the country, where it found the greatest organizing potential and interest.

Republican Network of Independent Monitors (RNIM)

During the current reporting period, RNIM came under investigation by government authorities. At the time of this writing, it is not clear what action, if any, the government plans to take against RNIM for purported violations, particularly concerning financial documentation and tax payments. This has hindered somewhat RNIM’s ability to conduct activities and to make future plans.

On April 04, 2005 RNIM held a press conference on the amendments to the election law and framework for Akim (executive) elections proposed by the government. The Network’s position was that the amendments would set back democratic development in Kazakhstan, and that some amendments were unconstitutional. The event was covered by four television channels and six newspapers.

In mid-April, NDI supported RNIM in delivering training to 37 election monitors for the Almaty Maslikhat (local legislature) by-elections. Women represented 82% of those trained. Youth, in the 18-35 age range, also made up more than 80 percent of participants. Deploying those monitors it had trained, RNIM observed elections in 32 electoral precincts within three districts of Almaty on April 24, 2005. In a press conference covered by four television stations after the election, RNIM reported widespread abuse of administrative resources and violations of monitors’ rights, together with a very low level of preparedness on the part of election

commissions. RNIM also monitored by-elections to Maslikhats in Karaganda (May 21), Shymkent (May 28) and Aktau (June 12).

NDI is currently working with RNIM on developing its organizational infrastructure, financial planning and developing contingency plans, in case the next presidential election will be held in December 2005.

Youth Information Service of Kazakhstan (YISK)

YISK was also investigated by the office of the Prosecutor General, whose representatives requested that it furnish lists of members and volunteers, in addition to financial records. The YISK bank account, which was frozen in January, remained frozen for several months, until it was released in May.

NDI's support of YISK during this quarter has focused primarily on helping YISK to identify additional funding sources and to apply for those funds. NDI is also working with YISK leadership on board development, financial management training, grant writing training for staff, and contingency planning for potential presidential elections in 2005.

C. Legislative Advocacy

NDI was active during the reporting period in advocacy efforts aimed at the proposed amendments to the laws on National Security, Domestic NGOs and International NGOs. Both in Almaty and in Washington, DC, NDI addressed appeals to President Nazarbayev and to the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan to reject the drafts. NDI staff in Washington met with Kazakhstani diplomats to express concern over the effects of the proposed legislation. NDI staff in Almaty met frequently with U.S. Embassy staff and members of the international NGO community, as well as with Kazakhstani NGOs, to discuss the proposed amendments. Despite these efforts, the amendments have moved through the legislative process without revision.

IV. PROGRAM EVALUATION AND RESULTS

During the reporting period, NDI has measured progress through the following objectives and benchmarks:

A. Political Party Programming

Objective: Assist the development of nationwide political party organizations in Kazakhstan.

Benchmark: Select parties have functioning offices that actively participate in the election process and local political life, in every region of the country.

ALGA DCK, which had been a registered political party as DCK but which was stripped of its party status by the government, has gathered more than 25,000 petitions toward registering anew as a political party. Party leaders used techniques learned at NDI training for grass-roots campaigning to conduct a coordinated nationwide voter outreach campaign.

Despite interference from executive authorities in several regions, party leaders are confident they will collect the minimum 50,000 signatures required for party registration.

Benchmark: Select parties have clear and substantive national policy programs.

The unified opposition movement For a Just Kazakhstan (FJK) has successfully proposed a single opposition candidate for the presidential election, and has communicated an opposition platform on which he will run.

Objective: Strengthen the capacity of political parties to participate effectively in elections.

Benchmark: Select parties have developed brief, tangible political “messages,” and delivered them effectively to voters.

Both pro-government and opposition parties have received training in grass-roots campaign techniques, which they have implemented in their own party-building efforts. By strengthening their base of knowledge in voter outreach techniques, political parties are better able to communicate their political messages to the electorate.

B. Civic Programming

Objective: Increase the long-term organizational capacity and sustainability of RNIM and YISK.

Benchmark: RNIM has developed an effective Charter and organizational structure.

During this quarter RNIM convened a meeting of its founders, at which it adopted measures aimed at improving organizational effectiveness and accountability, which it institutionalized through a new Charter. RNIM has improved its financial reporting mechanisms, and has streamlined its regional directorates, focusing support on those regions with the most competent representatives.

Benchmark: YISK developed a financial plan that identifies new sources of funding and ways to attract these funders.

YISK has submitted proposals for funding to several international organizations, including the World Bank, the Academy for Educational Development and the U.S. Embassy.

Objective: Promote the ability of NGOs to advocate positions on economic, social, and political issues, and to affect legislation pertinent to the process of democratization in Kazakhstan.

Benchmark: RNIM and YISK have conducted advocacy campaigns.

RNIM has held press conferences on the results of its monitoring of Maslikhat by-elections and on its assessment of the draft legislation on NGOs and national security introduced during this quarter by the parliament.

Benchmark: RNIM monitored election procedures and made recommendations for changes in the process.

RNIM monitored by-elections to Maslikhats in Almaty, Shymkent, Aktau and Karaganda, and publicized its findings through press conferences and press releases to national and regional media outlets.

V. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

While NDI's intention is to continue its political party work, the future is uncertain due to the new restrictive laws in Kazakhstan. As of this writing, the National Security Law was signed by the President and the NGO Laws are under consideration by the Constitutional Court. The Institute does not expect the Constitutional Court to object to these laws, although it allows for a small possibility that the President will veto them in order to gain international approval. NDI is not sure what limitations will be placed on its activities as a result of these laws.

NDI plans to continue to focus on improving the capabilities of a range of political parties at both the national and local levels. Programming would be designed to provide skills for parties to expand the abilities of their local branches, improve coordination between national and local organizations, and increase efforts to create a national platform and image. Planned training topics include: techniques of grassroots campaigning; coalition building; internal party management; and women's and youth participation in party activities.

NDI also plans to continue to sponsor multi-party forums to discuss national issues and share international experience on questions of concern to citizens of Kazakhstan.

With respect to civic programs, NDI plans to continue to support RNIM financially and with advice, consultation and outside expertise in the conduct of election monitoring and advocacy campaigns. NDI will work with RNIM on election monitor recruitment and training, on national and local-level advocacy campaigns for legislative reforms, increased responsiveness and accountability of elected officials, and on voter education. NDI also plans to assist RNIM in its ongoing organizational development, including planning and implementing volunteer recruitment and retention programs, developing fundraising capacity, and improving systems for management, reporting and communication.

NDI will also continue to support YISK in its League of Youth Voters program, and will work to develop YISK's capacity to achieve greater financial independence.

Finally, NDI will seek to establish working relationships with other civic groups throughout the country, to achieve a broader reach in civic advocacy campaigns across Kazakhstan.

VI. PERSONNEL/ADMINISTRATION

During this reporting period, the NDI-Almaty office was led by Sheila Ballen, resident director and political party trainer, with Laura Lockard directing civic programs. Field staff were assisted by a six-person local staff, a Washington-based program officer, regional director and other senior staff. Gulmira Adenova, a third-country national from Kyrgyzstan, directs NDI's regional information centers program, sponsored by the U.S. State Department Office of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor under a separate, complementary grant.